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The purpose of this thesis is to explore themes of self, suffering, and the ambiguous notions of paradoxes. Through an investigation of the monumental, I am examining what it means to erect, assert, deteriorate, and fall in tandem. While using examples of my work, I navigate my way through questions of silence, vulnerability, destruction, and resilience.

SILENT OCCUPANTS

by

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PREFACE

I used to have this fixation with deteriorating walls. Their crumbling, weathered, decaying bodies attached to buildings that always seemed caught between newer, cleaner, or more pristine construction. They stood there damaged and wounded but sturdy, unwavering despite appearance. Their exterior wear displayed as a testament for the architectures' resilience. Perhaps it was their loneliness, isolation, or vulnerability but this became my definition for the overlooked. It was never about the visual but rather what it represented. How something seemingly unnoticed could persevere and withstand, the unseen becoming visible. My work was about giving voice to the overlooked but more importantly it became about giving a voice to myself.

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CHAPTER I

SILENCE OF THE OVERLOOKED

I move through the world longing to be seen. My existence is a constant battle of not demanding attention but then feeling the disappointment of being forgotten. I struggle with presenting myself in a way that exudes confidence, mainly because of fear that I could never be enough, but also because I never want to be a burden. I want to take up as little space as possible so I retreat further within myself. I seek comfort in the realms of my inner world and find solace in my own solitude. I feel confined, trapped, and paralyzed but knowing that I disappointed myself is easier to grapple with than having the world do it first. I am someone who withdraws to process. Quiet, contemplative, and reserved. I am silent. And so is my work.

Silence does not negate power but rather embodies it. It is full of potential and the precursor to creation. When thinking about language, it is the necessary compliment to discourse. Silence is not only needed for communication, but serves as the foundation for dialogue. It is through its absence you can feel its presence. In reference to my work, the silence of this work comes from their receptiveness. They have the ability to take in, receive, and ground themselves in the present; which also speaks to their relation to feminine energy.

Counterpart to more dominant masculine energy, feminine energy exists as unwavering stillness. Confident, inviting, and enveloping. Feminine energy is also

embedded with creativity, sensibility, and receptivity. However, receptiveness does not imply passivity. This energy remains open, waiting for the world to come to it rather than reaching out and demanding attention. No outward energy is needed for the feminine as its magnetic stillness pulls you in. This is the same type of energy that flows out of my work. These large sculptures are present with their quiet assertiveness. Confronting in scale, they occupy space and stand firm where they land, but do not call out for attention. Their stillness is respected as they display their faults. Shown through discarded fragments and dusty plastered surfaces, these forms are just as fragile and vulnerable as they are confident. It is my goal to have these sculptures draw the viewer in slowly through silence and have the stillness reverberate.

By embracing these themes of self, suffering and femininity, I am responding with my own questions of how monolithic sculptures could rectify what it means to be still. Achieving a balance between charged oppositions does not negate the other but rather adds depth. Reveal/conceal, wear in/worn out, nurturing/destroying; my work exists in the middle of these paradoxes, while also grappling with how an individual visceral emotion can address collective, universal grief.

CHAPTER II

PAINTING MEETS SCULPTURE

Early on in my exploration I began to reject the standards of painting. I was not interested in painting within a frame, and felt that a rectangular, flat shape could not hold the vastness of what I wanted to convey. This led to me questioning what it meant for a painting to become sculpture and soon my six by four foot panels resisted conventional traditions. I painted on the floor, dismantling the idea of what was the top and bottom of the picture plane. I cut holes into the surface, forcing the actual painting to become a frame rather than window. I laid them horizontally on the ground, propped them up with bricks, stacked them on top of each other, and hung them protruding off the wall.

In the midst of this experimentation, I somehow got my hands on upholstery foam. I wanted to explore how destruction could show strength and resilience so I began cutting the thick foam blocks right down the center. A slow and monotonous process that resembled slicing flesh. With each pass of the blade, the wound was opened deeper, exposing its vulnerability as it struggled to stay together. After I completely destroyed the material, I would start the healing process. Using a needle and thread, I would stitch the fractured forms back together before dipping the mended foam into a milky white plaster that mimicked lotion. As shown in *Transparency of Total Sorrow* (Image 1) this process allowed me to think of paintings three dimensionally. The hardened plaster was able to manipulate the foam just enough for the shape to be contorted while the surface

remained flat to paint on. The foam and plaster combination was a major break through and it acted as a gateway into my current body of work. Soon, the question was no longer “how could painting become sculpture?” but rather, “how could sculpture become painting?”

CHAPTER III

PROCLAIMED SPACE

Existing in a state of constant balance, my work explores what it means to erect, assert, deteriorate, and fall in tandem. How the monumental can encompass fragility, and how silence can show strength and power. The monumental in reference to my work is defined as tall assertive Beings that proclaim power through their imposing scale. The idea that something heroic in size could become vulnerable while still standing remains a foundation for my practice. I am continuously exploring these questions along with their ambiguous notions.

Slouched, dusty, precarious, confident, and dignified these Beings proclaim their space in the world as they stand alone signifying their identity and integrity. The use of the word “Being” in my work alludes to the soul and essence of the structure. Although they take shape of biomorphic bodily forms, the work is more than just a corporeal reference. “Beings” speak to the entirety of their creation beyond just the visual. They are their own entity and desire to be seen, understood, and acknowledged.

I swapped upholstery foam for chicken wire, paint for cement dye and introduced burlap, batting and paper towels, while plaster remained a continuous thread. Representing my current body of work, this tall stretched form *Alone, Together* (Image 2) stands bold. Its skin is composed of plaster soaked batting, hardened and wrapped

around each protrusion and depression. Along with the structures monumental and confronting scale, the plastered material mimics textures of aggressive concrete or impenetrable armor making the piece look steady, but ultimately it is frail, damaged, and vulnerable. Sliced, torn, stitched, and glued back together, these materials embrace the essence of stability by a wearing into strength rather than out into uselessness. By leaning into the illusion of sturdiness, this piece undeniably began to mimic its durability. Presenting the question of how can your own vulnerability be a place of immense strength?

Vulnerability, at its most basic definition, is used to describe something that is susceptible to danger. It implies helplessness, as the exposure to harm is high. However, it does not singularly mean weakness. Vulnerability is about embracing, as well as understanding how things perceived as faults, could in fact, also be strengths. Further examples of vulnerability in *Alone, Together* are moments when the hidden becomes revealed. Carved into batting exposes the burlap's porous surface underneath, leaving the barrier thin between the Being and its environment (Image 3). It could easily be damaged, however it is still functioning as a veil to what is inside. In this way vulnerability harbors both the feeble and the resilient, thus embodying a paradox.

CHAPTER IV

COLORS OF SUPPORT

Nuanced browns, grays and creams are a steady theme in my work. These colors resemble the unmentionable, overlooked, and forgotten scraps of both the material and visceral world. Within their muddy appearance they hold inescapable deafening sensations of loneliness. They are the colors of debris on the side of the road, the single mitten drenched in rainwater, or the rusted, long forgotten bike. Although these stained pigments are often considered lackluster, they are also the colors of earth. Steadfast, dependable, and stable, brown simulates the color of foundation. The muteness, hollowness, as well as despair of this desolate color has been given the right to emerge as unwavering, assertive, and dependable.

Specifically in the piece *Of Earthly Means*, (Image 4) these dull, muted, somber, never on the “favorites” list, neglected colors, cling to the materials used to construct its form. Cement dye, plaster, burlap, paper towels and cardboard all depict the scars of destruction through their eroding surfaces. Standing roughly six feet tall, this awkwardly shaped Being is nothing shy of a battered and worn structure. Cardboard is wedged between decrepit burlap and kneaded patches of plastered batting, dyed paper towels hide underneath fabric that closely resembles dirt-stained rags or soggy recycled paper, and a protruding side emerges from clumps of plaster (Image 5). These colors do not

encourage perfection but rather embrace their flaws. Just like colors of dirt in the ground, brown represents stability and supportiveness. By purposefully building these forms aggressively, they build up tolerance and lean into their imperfections. With each shift of weight, dust falls from the casing leaving evident residue, but not enough to crumble. Ultimately these forms contain the resilience, stability, and dependability of earthly colors.

CHAPTER V

GIVING PAIN A SHAPE

What does it mean to stand on your own, unsupported, without the help of others? Figuring out how to be your own support while moving through the world is a daunting task full of insecurities and feelings of anxiety. The fear of being acknowledged is sometimes scarier than being overlooked. However, to be present in life there needs to be a willingness or at least an attempt at being seen. To counteract this sensation, an armor is necessary. Within my own life, there is an invisible barrier between the world and me. This armor is worn out of necessity rather than for desire, an emotional buffer that offers a false sense of safety. Confined, trapped, and apathetic, I begin to feel absent in my own life. However, for now it is what keeps me standing, holding my shape, independent from anyone.

In *Asserting to Defy* (Image 6) paper towels are feverishly wrapped around the armature leaving evident tonal shifts. Soft beige transitions into dark brown and dusty grays. The hardened glue dried paper, delicately weaves in and out of itself mimicking the folds of silk cloth. This bandaging nature represents the protective coating or armor of this Being. Bound and concealed, the Being is able to retreat further within itself while also taking shape. It is able to inhabit space standing fully on its own, without support. The two bodily shaped pillars ultimately exist as one, creating a void in the middle.

This absence of space is just as important as the positive forms creating it. Also shown in *Entrance to the Low and Humble Dwellings*, (Image 7) these hollow cavities act equally as both a collapsing and expansion of space- a space of breath. At its most inviting, these voids are physical entry points, an actualized space that holds the unknown. It contains you as well as allows you to pass through. Through its infinity of unknowing, it asks you to contend with its palpable emptiness.

The two voids in *Entrance to the Low and Humble Dwellings*, are outlined by a patchy, melancholic figure. Feelings of vulnerability, fear, shame, and loneliness are displayed through this compressed, extended, tucked, and bulging body. As the most potent form of feminine energy, this Being stands still while remaining open. The hollowness in the center cradles this ineffable energy as an attempt to contain the uncontainable void. And although this body leans, tilts, and slouches, there is a sense of confidence in which it stands. Steadfast and firm, it emerges from the ground that touches its base. Power comes from the flaws of imperfection as it resists the urge to surrender to destruction. This Being feels the weight of the earth and emphasizes with the burden you carry. It knows where you have been and where you can go. Its shape is the embodiment of both pain and resilience, as well as integrity.

CHAPTER VI

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

I see my art in relation to artists in the post minimal art movement along with current contemporary artists. Specifically I am interested in continuing the conversation of Eva Hesse, Phyllida Barlow, and Berlinde de Bruyckere. Hesse dealt with discovery of self in her work. Through her intuitive affinities of self she struggled with the question of what it meant to be a woman in a “male dominated medium.” Without surrendering to the masculine role, Hesse was able to embrace her own femininity. Phyllida Barlow creates imposing installations out of inexpensive, industrial materials while questioning how to reach into space and explore its depths. Lastly, Berlinde de Bruyckere’s work explores the limitations of the body along with the accompanying physical and emotional pain.

Within Hesse’s work I am drawn to her use of materials. She gravitated to pliable elements to emphasize their “non form.” To me, these non forms feel effortless and gentle but powerful, as they embody everything they are meant to be, thus becoming the sculpture. Trying to emulate this in my own work I strive to push my materials including plaster, batting, burlap, cardboard, and paper towels, to their highest potential. By discovering what they are capable of, I am hoping the work can become the material in itself rather than just constructed out of it.

The seriality within Hesse's work is another influence for me. By taking her theme of multiples, I am responding with my own question of how my work can stand alone, together. Each sculpture, different than the next, exists as a group. The solitude of these Beings are not lost but rather empathized with as they stand next to each other. While Hesse's work addressed feelings of emptiness, the void, and contended with contradictory notions of confident/insecure, needy/generous, and fragile/tough, I am continuing this conversation by finding ways to grapple with my own paradoxes. By holding both assertiveness and stillness in the same hand I am hoping to redefine what it means to be silent.

Phyllida Barlow's painterly sculptures resemble Brutalist architecture through their confronting, rigid, and aggressive configuration. When I look at her work, I cannot help but feel consumed and entirely engulfed by her overwhelming installations. Her imposing scale makes me question my place in the installation. Unsettled, I feel like I am entering a world in which I never had the permission to enter in the first place. I am the guest to the world she created. This sensation is something I am striving for within my own work as I want my sculptures to evoke a sense of reverence. Within their imposing structure, I am hoping to establish an environment where these sculptures radiate confident energy as well as silently drawing the viewer in.

With Berlinde de Bruyckere, I am enamored by her ability to depict pain and suffering with tenderness and grace. Her grotesque depictions of human conditions speak to the intensity of which this visceral pain can be felt. Her headless, bodily figures are the embodiment of such anxieties. By embracing themes of suffering in her work, I am

responding with my own conversation of how to acknowledge trauma and destruction without succumbing to it.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I want my work to evoke a powerful somberness. Though these Beings lean, tilt, and slouch, their confidence and assertiveness is not absent. This is something I am contending with in my own life as I am learning how to express silence, vulnerability, and embrace the present. My work chooses to speak to these themes by their destructive but resilient structures. They are defying what it means to hold both uncertainty and assertiveness in the same hand. They have persevered, withstood, and are still standing. And most importantly, these Beings acknowledge the power and strength that exists in the silence of the overlooked.

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CATALOG OF IMAGES

Image 1. *Transparency of Total Sorrow*, 2018. Plaster, oil, and upholstery foam, 48 x 36in.

Image 2. *Alone, Together*, 2019. Plaster, batting, burlap, rope, and string, 102 x 36in.

Image 3. *Alone, Together*. (detail).

Image 4. *Of Earthly Means*, 2019. Plaster, batting, burlap, cardboard, and paper towels, 72 x 36in.

Image 5. *Of Earthly Means*. (detail).

Image 6. *Asserting to Defy*, 2018. Paper towels, cement dye, and glue, 66 x 36in.

Image 7. *Entrance to Low and Humble Dwellings*, 2019. Plaster, batting, burlap, and string, 90 x 45 in.



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